EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Municipal Transit Circulator Policy Study

Project Overview

Recently, a number of communities in Miami-Dade County have expressed interest in establishing local transit circulator services to improve mobility and provide connections to the regional transit system. These types of services can serve local trips within a community and typically serve neighborhoods and areas not served by the County's transit system. Transit circulators offer significant potential toward improving the mobility of local communities' residents, employees, and visitors. Other benefits associated with transit circulators may include (1) easing traffic congestion by providing an alternative to the personal automobile for travel and (2) providing a transportation opportunity for a number of mobility-deprived citizens.

Several communities in Miami-Dade County already provide transit circulators including Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, and Aventura. Studies have been performed in several other communities and the implementation of circulator services is under serious consideration; however, no general policies or procedures exist to assess the feasibility of establishing these services.

Miami Beach Electrowave

In response to Miami-Dade County communities' interest in establishing or helping to fund local transit circulators and the lack of procedures for assessing the feasibility and planning for these services, the Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) initiated the *Local Municipal Transit Circulator Policy Study*. The two main objectives of this study were (1) to develop a set of guidelines and standards for establishing local transit circulator services and (2) to develop measures of effectiveness (MOEs) for evaluating these services.

Research and Data Collection

Recent planning studies for local transit circulators in Miami-Dade County were reviewed and a database was compiled for existing local transit circulator systems.

A number of common themes and consistent elements were identified in these planning studies. The typical recommended services were neighborhood circulators operating on local streets with links to the County's transit system. High-density areas with mixed land uses were regarded as the most ideal environment for instituting local transit circulator service. Target populations of potential riders included senior citizens, students, and low-income workers.

Data were collected from existing transit circulator systems and a transit circulator database was developed. In addition to obtaining data from Miami-Dade communities that provide circulator services, data were compiled from a number of communities in Broward County, Florida, and from three communities outside of South Florida to provide a wider perspective on these types of services.

Transit Circulator Survey

County and municipal staffs were surveyed to determine interest in establishing local transit circulators and to identify issues that may affect the establishment of these services.

A transit circulator survey was developed to identify communities in Miami-Dade County interested in establishing or expanding transit circulator services. The survey also obtained data on existing transit circulators in the communities that offer these services. Surveys were sent to 35 communities, including 30 Miami-Dade County municipalities and 5 municipalities from outside the County. The survey was returned by 22 (63 percent) of these communities, including ten communities with existing transit circulators. According to municipal staff, reaction to transit circulators has been extremely positive in the communities that provide these services. In addition, the survey found that several communities were in the process of establishing circulators or were at least considering establishing circulators.

Data Analysis

The database of existing local transit circulators and results of the survey were analyzed to identify conditions and service characteristics that may be required for establishing these services.

Miramar Community Shuttle Bus

Results of the data analysis indicate that an elderly population may provide a significant ridership base for community circulators, especially in communities with smaller overall populations. Surprisingly, circulator service is more widespread in municipalities with higher per capita incomes; these communities tend to have more funds available to subsidize the circulator service.

Four different types of circulator routes were identified:

- Downtown circulators
- Neighborhood circulators
- Park-ride and feeder circulators
- Shopping-based/"lifeline" circulators

The type of transit circulator route is dictated by a community's transit needs, which are driven by the community's socioeconomic and geographic characteristics. Downtown circulator routes are often offered in downtowns, outlying business districts and high employment areas; neighborhood circulators are often located in suburban municipalities with lower population densities; park-ride and feeder circulator routes serve peak period commuter needs; shopping-based or "lifeline" circulators typically operate in municipalities that have high proportions of elderly citizens.

Development Guidelines and Standards for Local Circulator Services

A generalized approach for developing and monitoring the performance of local transit circulators was established.

General policy and legal issues associated with the implementation of municipal transit circulator services were examined and broad guidelines were developed for application to all potential municipal circulator services, regardless of the type of service being considered or location. Factors considered included:

- Role of municipal circulator services
- Interlocal agreement
- Risk management
- Federal/state regulations
- Section 13(c) labor protection
- Americans with Disabilities Act

A list of general policy and legal issues municipalities should follow when planning transit circulator service was developed and is shown below.

General Policy and Legal Issues Guide

1. Municipalities should provide localized services and MDT will provide broader county-wide service.
2. Municipalities that establish circulator service must enter into an interlocal agreement with Miami-Dade County.
3. Municipalities must be aware of the liability associated with operating a municipal circulator service and hold harmless the County from liabilities and claims. If the circulator service is contracted to a private transportation provider, the County must be named as an additional insured on the policy.
4. Municipalities must comply with all federal, state, and local regulations regarding the provision of transit services.
5. Municipal circulator service should complement - not compete with - MDT service, so as not to endanger Section 13(c) protected employees.
6. All transit circulator vehicles must be ADA compliant.

Two-Step Planning Process

In addition, a **two-step planning process** was developed as a model for municipalities to follow when considering and planning local transit circulator services. **"Step One"** is the initial planning effort during the development of local transit circulator services. A scorecard of weighted attributes was developed for **"Step One"** to assist municipalities in evaluating the feasibility of establishing circulator services.

Step-One Initial Service Proposal Evaluation Elements

1. Indicators of transit dependency or propensity to use circulators including assessment of ranges of population density, percentage of elderly residents, household income level, and personal automobile unavailability.
2. Indicators of recognizable gaps in transit service in the community.
3. Indicators of activity centers in the community that are not served or are underserved by transit.
4. Indicators of relatively frequent requests or calls for community transit circulator services.
5. Indicators of municipal support for contributing funds for the initial feasibility study.
6. Indicators of municipal support for contributing funding the actual circulator services.

Step-Two Detailed Feasibility Assessment Framework

"Step Two" of the planning process provides a more detailed feasibility assessment framework that should only be undertaken if **"Step One"** indicates that transit circulator service is feasible. The purpose of **"Step Two"** is to assist in developing operations, management, and financial plans for the circulator service. Although each community has specific mobility needs and unique socioeconomic and geographic characteristics, a number of general recommendations for developing circulator services were provided as guidance in this step. Some of these recommendations are shown below.

- Circulator routes should be fairly direct and not try to serve all community mobility needs; shorter circulators tend to attract more passengers per revenue hour.
- Headways of 30 minutes or shorter are strongly recommended for municipalities that are serious about providing a viable transportation alternative for their residents.
- Circulator schedules and routes should be coordinated with the schedules and routes of other transit providers to provide "timed-transfer networks," whenever feasible. "Timed-transfer points" are especially important when headways are infrequent.
- Public input should be obtained during the planning stage to determine operating parameters desirable from the standpoint of the potential riders.

- Circulator vehicles should be easily distinguishable from Miami-Dade Transit buses and be identifiable as a separate municipal transit service.
- Major capital investment may be avoided and implementation may be hastened by contracting the municipal transit service to a private transportation provider; however, a municipality that operates the transit circulator service internally may take a more active role and may become more intrinsically involved with ensuring the system's success.
- Marketing strategy is vital for building community awareness of and support for a circulator system and attracting ridership.
- Funding for municipal circulator service may be obtained from a number of local, state, federal, and private sources; however, these funding sources are highly competitive and most are not indefinitely available. Municipalities typically fund the majority of costs associated with ongoing, successful transit circulator services internally.

Post-Implementation Monitoring

After a municipal transit circulator is implemented, evaluation of the system's performance is needed to ensure the public's mobility needs are served. Continuing performance monitoring also assists in adjusting services for efficiency and effectiveness.

A critical component of the post-implementation monitoring program is maintaining a public outreach program, as public involvement is important to help define the role of the circulator system in the community.

The municipality should also perform an evaluation of the municipal transit circulator service at least on an annual basis; often a monitoring process and annual evaluation is a requirement of funding agencies. Performance and service goals should be established for review during the annual evaluation process and measurable objectives should be developed for assessment. Typical performance measures include annual passengers per route, passengers per revenue hour, costs per passenger, and on-time performance. Examples of useful applications of the monitoring process include revising or adding new routes, adjusting headways, and modifying hours of operation.

Conclusion

Currently, Miami-Dade County sometimes assists with the planning for local transit circulators and municipalities receive grants from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) or other agencies to initiate the circulator service. However, grant support often expires after a period of two to three years and municipalities then must obtain funding from other sources or discontinue the circulator service if new funding sources cannot be secured.

Aventura Advantage Shuttle Bus

The objective of the *Local Municipal Transit Circulator Policy Study* was to provide guidelines for municipalities to follow when planning local transit circulators. This study provides a framework that will (1) provide Miami-Dade municipalities with a good screening and assessment tool for considering local transit circulators and (2) allow Miami-Dade County to better evaluate requests for assistance in planning and establishing municipal transit circulators. Municipalities can benefit from this study by following the recommended planning process to first determine if transit circulator service is feasible and, if the service is assessed as feasible, to develop a circulator system that serves the community's mobility needs with an improved chance of continued success.